

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

25 October 1975

Mitchell: Kept in Dark On Domestic Spying

United Press International

WASHINGTON — Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell testified yesterday that he had been kept in the dark about illegal domestic intelligence activities and believes President Richard M. Nixon had been, too.

Mitchell told the Senate Intelligence Committee that while he was told in mid-1971 that the CIA was conducting "mail covers," in which information on the outside of envelopes was noted, he did not know that agents were opening and reading letters.

Mail covers are legal; mail opening is not.

"Do you believe that President Nixon knew of the mail opening program?" Chairman Frank Church (D., Idaho) asked.

"I would believe not," replied Mitchell, who was Nixon's attorney general and campaign manager. He now is facing up to eight years in prison for his conspiracy and perjury

conviction in the Watergate coverup.

Mitchell said he also was unaware of the FBI's counterintelligence project of infiltrating domestic radical groups, and he strongly hinted that as attorney general he had little control over the FBI or its late director, J. Edgar Hoover.

"He worked directly under me," Mitchell said with a slight smile. "I'm not sure if he worked directly for me."

Mitchell's hair was grayer than when he testified in the same room more than two years ago at the Watergate hearings, and he seemed to have lost weight. He was relaxed and affable, though the tremor noticed in his right hand during the coverup trial a year ago appeared now to also affect his left.

Several Capitol policemen and spectators surrounded him to shake his hand as he left, and one woman said she had been "rooting" for him. "Thanks, honey," Mitchell said.

Mitchell, summoned to testify over his protest that it might jeopardize his Watergate appeal, confirmed that he had a 22-minute meeting with CIA Director Richard Helms June 1, 1971, in which mail surveillance was discussed in passing.

Helms left the impression in testimony earlier this week that he had told Mitchell of actual mail openings, but Mitchell insisted that they spoke only of mail covers. He said also that he never received any opened mail from Helms "or anyone else in the CIA."